

# Cohen announces anthrax shot slowdown

By Capt. James G. Bishop

WASHINGTON – The Department of Defense is temporarily slowing its anthrax immunization efforts, Secretary of Defense William Cohen announced July 10. The slowdown will affect nearly 11,000 Air Force reservists and about 363,000 service members currently receiving anthrax immunizations, who have returned from high-threat areas.

Inoculations will continue for troops in Southwest Asia and Korea but will be deferred for most others.

Rudy De Leon, assistant secretary of defense, told a subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee on July 13, "I think, given the amount of supply that we have and after consultation, we believe the prudent policy is to return to the 30-day policy...." De Leon explained that the policy mandated anthrax vaccinations for troops in high-threat areas for 30 days or longer.

Cohen cited two reasons for the slowdown. Doses of the vaccine are dwindling and the sole manufacturer, BioPort Corp. of Lansing, Mich., has not yet received Food and Drug Administration approval for its new manufacturing plant, he said.

Most of the remaining vaccine will be used to immunize military people in the high-threat areas of Southwest Asia and Korea, Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Randall West, a senior Pentagon adviser on chemical and biological protection, said in a news conference the

day after Cohen's announcement.

DOD had been using about 75,000 doses per month. West said the number would be reduced to around 14,000 per month.

In Air Force Reserve Command, 11,557 people have begun the anthrax immunization as of July 12. Of those, 461 people have finished all six-shots, and an average of 142 reservists are deployed to high-risk areas at any given time, leaving about 10,954 reservists who will defer their final shots.

West said DOD plans to defer immunizations for those returning from high-threat areas who have begun the series of six shots. After the stock of vaccine is resupplied, individuals can begin the schedule where they left off. If members have had one shot and more than two years has elapsed, they will begin the series again.

If they have had two or more shots, they will pick up the series at the point they left off, no matter how much time has elapsed, according to Dr. Sue Bailey of the assistant secretary of defense for health affairs.

"As soon as a sufficient and safe supply of vaccine is available, we will expand the program, ultimately vaccinating all members of the active and reserve force," Cohen said.

DOD plans to "provide protection to the persons that are shore-based in the high-

threat areas," West said. If the usage rate continues at about 14,000 doses per month, the stockpiled vaccine – 165,000 doses – would last six to 10 months, he said.

Some vaccine located at units in more than 2,000 places will be shipped to the high-threat areas to be used during the slowdown period, West said. He said DOD guidance allows for local commanders' discretion, so, for example, rotating troops might still get shots because the 10-dose vaccine vials must be used or discarded once opened.

The 10 areas the Pentagon has determined to be high-threat are Korea, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Oman, Yemen, United Arab Emirates and Israel.

"We've had 351 people that have refused to take the shot and have remained adamant enough about that to receive disciplinary action or be discharged or released from service," West said. Out of 1.8 million shots given, 848 adverse reaction reports have been filed with the Anthrax Vaccine Expert Committee as of July 5. Of those, 163 people have missed at least one day of work because of an adverse reaction, and 38 have been hospitalized.

In the early 1990s, weapons inspectors discovered that Iraq produced 8,000 liters of anthrax spores, and intelligence sources verified in 1992 that the former Soviet Union maintained a capability that dwarfed Iraq's, according to the Army's Anthrax Vaccine Immunization Program Agency.

(AFRC News Service)

## Mandatory 6-month waiting period before outprocessing

by MSgt. Sandi Michon

Due to manning shortages within the wing, and throughout Air Force Reserve, new guidelines are in effect regarding the release or reassignment of reservists. Those primarily affected are: transfers to Air National Guard, Individual Mobilization Augmentees, Inactive Reserve, another reserve unit or voluntary reassignment and retirements.

Requests now require wing commander approval and a six-month (180-day) lead time prior to reassignment or outprocessing. If approved, the member is required to outprocess the UTA closest to the reassignment date. A member may not outprocess beyond their reassignment date.

According to 439<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing Commander Col. Martin M. Mazick, the 180-day policy is necessary to sustain manning critical to readiness and to perform the on-

going mission. It will also help management forecast manning losses and recruit replacements.

Under the new guidelines, the wing commander retains authority to disapprove requests for reassignments that are not fully justified or that will degrade mission accomplishment.

Members with approved reassignments are expected to participate in their reserve commitment through the 180-day period and unit commanders should use extreme discretion in granting excused absences.

Additionally, members should be aware that Servicemen's Group Life Insurance (SGLI) premiums are deducted regardless of participation if the member does not indicate otherwise.

The 180-day lead-time period begins once the paperwork is submitted and approved by the wing commander.

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